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ABSTRACT

Background information on a new general studies curriculum at Southwest Texas State University is presented, along with faculty views about the new curriculum. The proposed three-level program covers essential skills, disciplinary perspectives, and integrative courses. Specific skills and content are outlined, along with the number of credit hours for each area. Students would also be required to complete 18 hours of writing intensive coursework in their degree program. While the interviewed faculty supported the concept of a solid academic foundation, there were serious misgivings about the design of the proposed new program. Of concern were a severe work overload and the realities of the state's enrollment-driven funding formula. Some faculty feared that funds accessible to the university would be allocated only to departments responsible for actively generating student credit hours. Increased or continued funding for faculty positions might be directed to departments that demonstrate high student demand for their courses. While the ideals of general education were appreciated, faculty found financial realities important, and many questioned whether, instead of focusing on the new curriculum, the current academic foundations program could have been revised. (SW)

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FACULTY PERCEPTIONS OF GENERAL STUDIES: A CASE ANALYSIS

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November 1, 1985

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FACULTY PERCEPTION OF GENERAL STUDIES: A CASE ANALYSIS

I. The Setting

General education is once again the focus of analysis, advocacy, and sustained scrutiny in American higher education. While the concepts of general education are not new, hundreds of colleges and universities in the United States have recently taken steps to strengthen their basic common curricular requirements. Conservative curricular reformers and progressive pedagogical integrationists alike have launched intentional efforts to address the educational goal of encouraging and enabling the acquisition and utility by students of a broad and widely ranging academic foundation. Such an effort is currently underway at Southwest Texas State University in San Marcos, Texas.

In the fall semester of 1986 the curriculum of the College of General Studies will be implemented at Southwest Texas. Officially born in a speech given to the Southwest Texas faculty by President Robert L. Hardesty on April 13, 1983, the College of General Studies is a college without faculty. The administrative office of the College supervises the general education program, validating and monitoring courses that meet the specific requirements of the General Studies curriculum. In addition, the College of General Studies coordinates academic advising to students who have not declared a major and administers the testing program for competency and proficiency in essential skills. According to the current design, all instruction in General

Studies courses will be taught in and under the supervision of other schools in the University.

Since its founding in 1903, Southwest Texas has evolved from a two-year normal school to a multi-purpose state university with a student body numbering more than 19,000. SWT offers 132 undergraduate degree programs in the Schools of Applied Arts and Technology, Business, Education, Fine Arts and Communication, Health Professions, Liberal Arts, and Science. The university also offers 43 programs leading to master's degrees.

By their very nature universities include faculty members with widely varying perspectives and ideologies. Anyone attempting to arrive at universal opinions by faculty members of any university is destined to experience some degree of frustration in the pursuit of an impossible goal. Yet, that somewhat Quixotic task represents the purpose of this investigation -- to discover Southwest Texas faculty response to the implementation of the College of General Studies. How does one discover how a faculty feels? It is possible to review the public records of proceedings where faculty input was sought. Yet, such records never tell a complete story. It is also possible to canvas the faculty with questionnaires that solicit feedback on designated subjects. Yet, such questionnaires are problematic in that the responses received can be functionally skewed by such factors as questionnaire design, the degree of anonymity promised or assumed, the rate of response, and the extent to which the questionnaire complies with accepted scientific methodology. It is also possible to interview

the faculty, assuring the ones interviewed of the interviewer's integrity and trustworthiness. Yet, such interviews suffer at least the same limitations as all of the previously mentioned methods plus the high degree of subjectivity that is inescapable by even the most objectively-intentioned interviewer. However, interviews allow for active dialogue, provide an instant forum for challenge and clarification of inquiries, and generate rich oportunities to detect fervor and passion.

II. The Task

With the permission, direction, encouragement, and support of General Studies Dean Rollo Newsom, Associate Dean "De" Johnson, and Acting Vice President of Academic Affairs Robert Gratz, I undertook the assignment of exploring the faculty feelings about the imminent implementation of the General Studies program. When I began the assignment, I knew no one on the faculty. My official capacity at the University was as an administrative intern pursuing an instructional project. My positional assignment was temporary, and my academic and professional accountability was primarily to the University of Texas at Austin where I am a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Educational Administration with a focus in Higher Education. My project's intent would be to provide the Southwest Texas administration a better understanding of faculty perception and feeling as the university prepares for the functional inauguration of the General Studies curriculum in the fall.

I was granted the freedom to design the study without

interference from anyone. At the same time, I was provided with appropriate facilities for gathering data and recording my findings. Additionally, I was encouraged to approach any or all faculty or staff members that I wanted to approach.

To accomplish my stated task, I chose not to develop and circulate a questionnaire for general distribution to the faculty. Though effective arguments could be forwarded in support of such a questionnaire, I felt that developing an adequate, legitimate instrument that would solicit candid, informative responses would be difficult. Instead, acknowledging the methodological limitations, I chose to interview as many faculty and administrative staff members as would be judiciously possible. For this task, I did not seek to randomly select faculty or staff members to interview. Instead, I wanted to seek out people selectively who might be in critical positions either officially or personally in the development of General Studies and people who might for some other reason be in a position to be particularly informed or opinionated about the subject. Consequently, I consulted with Dean Newsom and Associate Dean Johnson who developed a list of fifty persons including all members of the General Studies Advisory Council, most of the Deans in the University, some of the faculty members who had corresponded with the College of General Studies regarding some issue in the previous year, several of the department Chairs, some members of the administrative staff, some faculty members of long standing who were reported to be disaffected by the General Studies

Program, and some members of the faculty who were reported to be relatively pleased with the General Studies Program. The list of fifty included six deans, thirty-eight faculty members (fifteen of whom chair departments), and six administrative staff members.

At the beginning of the fall semester, 1985, I wrote a note to each of the fifty people on my list explaining my intended project and indicating that I would be attempting to set up a one half hour interview. Included with the note was a copy of a memo from Dean Newsom indicating his support of the project and encouraging the cooperation of the persons addressed. Anonymity was promised and candor encouraged.

Of the fifty people on the original list, two indicated their preference not to talk, deferring to others and indicating, courteously, that all they intended to say about General Studies had either already been said or could be said by someone else. In the course of the interviews with the other people on the list, I issued the invitation to suggest additional faculty members with whom it might be important for me to talk. I communicated with each of the twenty-three faculty and five staff members suggested, either in conversation or in correspondence, describing the project and soliciting input that might help accomplish the stated goal.

The average time spent in the interviewing process was slightly more than one hour per person. I was received with courtesy by all and an apparent eagerness by some. My pledge to each person interviewed included an assurance that I would report

my findings honestly, diplomatically, and without personal citation. Further, to assure thoroughness and anonymity, I agreed to circulate a copy of the draft of this document to all those interviewed for review to solicit critical feedback and to ascertain whether inadvertantly I might have identified a participant in my interview survey.

III. The Context

Reporting on the feelings of the Southwest Texas State University faculty about General Studies requires a historical context that can begin with President Hardesty's speech to the faculty in 1983 (Hardesty, 1983).

> . . . Most of us are trained to teach and to do research in particular specialties. We think of the university as a kind of patchwork quilt with bright but isolated patches of study, each designed to prepare students in narrow emphases that we call "majors." But the model of the university as a patchwork of relatively unrelated groups of programs has a significant drawback. It divides the faculty into highly-specialized and separate groups, isolated from colleagues by their vocabularies and methodologies.
>
> . . . As the major has grown in importance within the curriculum, that very critical portion of our students' studies that we call "general education" has shrunk in importance. In some universities, general education has shrunk in size, to the point where students spend most of their time working on their majors. In others, like Southwest Texas, for example, the number of credit hours required in general education has remained high -- but the idea of a common knowledge base seems to have lost both its promise and its meaning.
>
> Our students have no clear sense of the shape or the rationale of the academic foundations curriculum. And all too often when they complete the "required courses," they leave with a sigh of relief, instead of a sense of intellectual fulfillment. Nowhere in their Academic Foundations do they come close to achieving the ideal of a unified and coherent understructure of skills and knowledge needed to build toward their major studies.
>
> We run the risk of turning out well-trained technicians who know and understand very little of our common social heritage, who have no understanding of the ethical

> dimensions of their jobs, who are cultural illiterates. You see them every day in your classrooms: students who can neither synthesize nor compute, who have no notion of unifying concepts, who understand only isolated pieces of the whole, who lack the fundamental skills of making connections and expressing ideas. This is a problem whose solution is absolutely basic to the success of every academic program -- a problem that requires us to re-examine the idea of the university -- the fragmented patchwork -- and restore coherence to our general education program.
>
> . . . . I think the time is right for moving ahead in our plans to assure a real educational foundation for our students. To my mind, the most effective way to emphasize the Academic Foundations program is through a College of General Studies.

President Hardesty emphasized the formative nature of the plan for a College of General Studies. Having enunciated the "concept," he called on the faculty -- in a cooperative spirit -- to "help figure out the details" of the program of General Studies, emphasizing his hope for a shared endeavor.

> . . . I want us to try this concept -- together. I want you to share my sense of excitement about what this program can accomplish. I want your advice and counsel as we progress. I want you to make constructive suggestions that will lead to the more assured success of the program; and I want you to point out the problems and difficulties and participate cooperatively as we work to resolve them. I am convinced that this common effort will result in a program in which we can all take pride, a program that will distinguish Southwest Texas State University among all of the universities in the state. I cherish your help and your participation.

President Hardesty moved quickly to implement a plan for a program of General Studies. In May, the president presented a proposal to the Board of Regents, Texas State University System. After subsequent approval in July by the Coordinating Board, Texas College and University System, the Office of General Studies was established at Southwest Texas. In September, following the intensive work of a search committee that included solicitation of

nominations and applications from the faculty and speeches by and interviews with the finalists, Dr. Rollo K. Newsom, Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, was recommended to and appointed by President Hardesty as the Dean of General Studies. Dr. Diana "De" Johnson, Assistant Professor in the Department of Education and Director of the Student Learning Assistance Center, was named Assistant Dean. To provide guidance for the program, a General Studies Advisory Council composed of a representative from each of the academic departments at the University was appointed.

In October, 1983, the Council and Dean Newsom designated five subcommittees from among the General Studies Advisory Council to address the issues of curriculum, academic advising, teaching excellence, evaluation, and testing. The Council instructed the Curriculum and Academic Advising Subcommittees to proceed as rapidly as judiciously possible to prepare reports that would contain carefully crafted proposals for consideration by the Council for eventual implementation. The other three subcommittees were also given instructions regarding specific tasks to be accomplished related to designated objectives, but their tasks were clearly perceived to possess less immediate urgency. The Testing Subcommittee was to begin gathering background information for use in the committee's eventual role assisting in the selection of a director for the testing center. The Evaluation Subcommittee would initiate planning for routine evaluation procedures for the General Studies Program and personnel. The

Teaching Excellence Subcommittee was instructed to design a procedure for rewarding outstanding classroom teachers.

Although the specific idea for a College of General Studies came from President Hardesty's proposal, the general concept of well rounded instruction in a core curriculum was not new to Southwest Texas State University. Since its inception as a normal school, SWT has included a substantial requirement for general education in its instructional program. The University has always emphasized the broader educational base that is required for teacher certification. In the history of the University, the curriculum has undergone several reviews. In 1971, one such review of the general education component of the curriculum -- Academic Foundations -- resulted from a request by the Professional Schools. Because the Professional Schools contended that specific and specialized demands by external certification and licensing agencies were making the Academic Foundations curriculum an unrealistic burden, an Academic Foundations curriculum was sought that would be sufficiently rigorous but which would require a reduced quantity of hours. Subsequently, the Academic Foundations requirement was adjusted slightly to 44 hours for the professional Schools and 47 hours for the schools of Liberal Arts, Sciences, and Fine Arts and Communicaton. However, all students seeking teaching certification in Texas Public Schools are required a substantially greater amount of general education. The SWT undergraduate teacher education program has, consequently, maintained a minimum requirement of 56 hours in academic

foundations.

In a major effort to review, evaluate, and improve the Academic Foundations component of the curriculum, a special Task Force on Academic Foundations was appointed in 1982 to conduct a significant and thorough examination of the general educational component of the curriculum for the purpose of recommending modifications to the university's instructional design. That task force presented its recommendations to the Southwest Texas community for comment and review shortly after the establishment of the Office of General Studies. Included in the recommendation was a four level curriculum requiring from 54 to 65 hours of academic work.

Level one: University Skills

A. A three hour quantitative course
(college algebra level or advanced)

B. A two hour analytical course
(philosophy course in reasoning and analysis)

C. Three to six hours of freshman composition
(writing composition)

D. Three hours of upper level composition
(across the curriculum composition)

E. Three hours of oral communicaton
(survey of basic oral communication skills
and principles)

F. A one hour course in computer literacy.

Level two: Legislative Degree Requirements

(legislatively mandated course work)

A. Six hours of American history survey

B. Six hours of political science

(including study of the United States and Texas constitution)

Level three: Breadth of knowledge

A. Nine hours of courses in the humanities

1. Three hours of literature
2. Three hours of fine arts
3. Three hours of philosophy, or three additional hours of literature

B. Six hours of work in social science

C. Seven hours of a natural science

D. Two hours of physical activity

E. Eight hours of a foreign language unless the language requirement could be satisfied with a satisfactory performance on a university administered competency examination

Level four: Integrative Knowledge

A three hour interdisciplinary, integrative course of synthesis.

These recommendations provided primary data for consideration as the Curriculum Subcommittee pursued its task. In April, 1984, the Curriculum Subcommittee and the Advising Subcommittee presented recommendations to the General Studies Advisory Council. In November, 1984, the Teaching Excellence

Subcommittee delivered recommendations to the Advisory Council, and in May, 1985, the Advisory Council received the recommendations of the Testing Subcommittee. The Advising Subcommittee report developed a plan that included a carefully designed format for randomly assigning advisory responsibilities for "pre-majors" among the various departments in the University. This recommendation was accepted essentially intact. The Testing Subcommittee recommendation included provision for placement testing in English and Mathematics, General Studies examinations in Mathematics, Writing, and Critical Thinking, and the establishment of a University testing center. The reported recommendations were consequently ammended by the General Studies Advisory Council to eliminate the General Studies examination in Critical Thinking and modify some of the particular details of acquiring, validating, and implementing the examinations themselves. The report of the Teaching Excellence Subcommittee was accepted virtually intact as a recommendation to the university president. However, the work and report of the curriculum subcommittee was considerably more complicated.

During careful and arduous deliberations, the curriculum subcommittee had considered the report of the Academic Foundations Task Force, heard many hours of testimony that represented widely ranging faculty reaction, reviewed a substantial body of literature regarding curriculum design, and struggled to reach agreement on a recommendation that could be supported by the entire subcommittee. In spite of its diligence, the subcommittee

was unable to achieve concensus. Although the entire subcommittee was able to agree about substantial portions of the report, the official recommendation received the support of only six of the eight members.

The proposals submitted by the subcommittee were built upon the specified assumption that by 1988 most college-bound graduates of Texas high schools will have completed four years of English, two years of the same modern language, and attained "hands-on" computer competency as a part of their high school curricula. The curriculum proposed included a three-level program of general education: essential skills, disciplinary perspectives, and integrative courses. The subcommittee also specified that since the purpose of general education is to broaden a student's knowledge and understanding, a maximum of nine hours of courses which satisfy general education requirements may count toward a student's major and/or minor.

Level One: Essential Skills

(Instruction in reading, writing, speaking, listening, computation, and mathematics)

A. Six hours of courses emphasizing composition skills

B. Three hours surveying basic oral communication skills

C. Three hours of instruction in computation skills at the college algebra level or its equivalent according to the definition of the Advisory Council.

Level Two: Disciplinary Perspectives

A. The historical perspective - six hours in American

history (by legislative mandate)

B. The political perspective - six hours of instruction in the United States and Texas political systems (by legislative mandate)

C. The natural science perspective - either seven hours of one science or two different four hour laboratory science courses

D. The social science perspective - three hours of one of the basic social sciences

E. The philosophical perspective - a three hour course that examines universal philosophical problems that have challenged the best thoughts of mankind. At least one half of this philosophy course will focus on the basic skills of problem solving and critical thinking.

F. The multicultural perspective - three or four hours of course work drawn primarily from modern languages, literature, and social sciences designed to expose the student to other cultures

G. The literary perspective - a three hour course that provides an introduction to understanding, analysis, and appreciation of great literature

H. The fine arts perspective - three hours offering an exposure to values in music, theatre, and art

I. The physical fitness perspective - two hours of courses which include structured physical actvity

Level Three: Integrative Courses

A. A one hour Freshman Seminar would provide an overview of the General Studies Program, introduce the notion of interrelationship among disciplinary perspectives, and highlight the values of general education.

B. A three hour capstone course - this upper division course allow application of knowledge acquired through general studies courses as well as in major and minor studies

In addition to this three level course and discipline-specific program of general education, the curriculum sub-committee proposed that each student be required to satisfactorily complete eighteen hours of writing intensive coursework in their degree program. Further, the subcommittee recommended that some of these hours be taken at the Junior/Senior levels. Specific instructions are included in the proposal for the General Studies Advisory Committee to designate some courses in the General Studies curriculum as writing intensive, but no specificity is indicated as to how many or what kind of courses would be so designated.

The two dissenting members of the subcommittee circulated throughout the General Studies Advisory Council and the University community a recommendation that would have yielded a net quantitative increase of five hours and a redistribution of designated course requirements. This minority report contended that the quantity of hours of general studies required (and consequently the number of hours allowed in designated courses in major, minor, or supporting fields) in the majority recommendation

represented a "significant diminution in the quality of general education that our students will receive and continues the recent trend toward excessive specialization in undergraduate education. . . .We have opened our undergraduate degree to greater technical training and reduced the role of the relativisitic approaches of the social sciences." The minority report proposed that the social science and literary perspective requirements be increased by three hours each, that the multicultural perspective and all of Level Three courses be eliminated, and that the curriculum require one year of study in a foreign language (6-8 hours).

In order to transform the general recommendation of the curriculum subcommittee into lists of designated courses fulfilling specifications, the General Studies Advisory Council appointed subcommittees to function as task oriented ad hoc working groups. It became the monumental task of these subcommittees to translate the general recommendations of the curriculum report into an actual curricular outline. These working groups' proposals were then presented to the Advisory Council for consideration. Consequently, a comprehensive list of approved courses emerged for each category of the curriculum recommendation.

Following the publication and distribution of the lists, several appeals were formulated. Among the appeals were requests from the Health and Physical Education Department that Biology 2340 and 2350, Human Anatomy and Physiology, be increased in semester credit hours from three each to four each and that they

then be included among those courses designated to fulfill the General Studies Science requirement. From the Department of Education came a request that General Science 3310 and 3320, laboratory courses designed to acquaint elementary and special education degree students with the fundamentals of physical, biological, and earth sciences, be included among those courses satisfying the General Studies Science requirement. The Department of Sociology-Anthropology requested that Anthropology 2414, Physical Anthropology, be included among the courses designated to fulfill the General Studies Science requirement. Each of these appeals failed. The Department of Criminal Justice successfully appealed the decision to exclude Criminal Justice 4365, Comparative Criminal Justice, from the courses on Multicultural Perspective. Additionally, after several appeals regarding the criteria for the Multicultural Perspective, the General Studies Advisory Council determined that the intent of the perspective is to "focus primarily on non-U.S. culture." Consequently, the name was changed to International Perspective.

In the fall of 1985, the 1986 catalog copy for the College of General Studies was approved by the General Studies Advisory Council and submitted for print. The formative input had reached its symbolic culmination. General Studies would become a reality.

On September 26, 1985, President Robert Hardesty addressed the faculty presenting an overview of "nine goals for the nineties" which Southwest Texas will be seeking to address as it anticipates entry into the University's centennial decade

(Hardesty, 1985).

> . . . The first goal is to reduce the student-faculty ratio to 24:1, and to ease the burden of the current faculty work load.
>
> . . . Our second goal . . . is to double the amount of endowed funding to the University from private sources by 1990.
>
> . . . Our third goal will be to strengthen the partnership between the University and the Alumni Association.
>
> . . . The fourth goal is to create an effective staff development program.
>
> . . . Our fifth goal is to reduce [student] attrition by one-third.
>
> . . . The sixth goal . . . will be to increase graduate enrollment by 40 percent . . . by 1990.
>
> . . . [The seventh goal is to] expand our outreach in the central Texas area.
>
> . . . The eighth goal deals with General Studies. By 1990 we will have seen four classes of Freshmen enter the General Studies program. We will have developed a testing program to measure the basic skills of our students. We will have identified the capstone courses and refined the freshman seminar. It will be time, then, to evaluate formally the curriculum to determine whether it contains the right courses to deliver the kind of broad-based education we want for our students. Of course, we will be refining and correcting the program every semester between now and then, but in 1990 we will want to make a more thorough and systematic evaluation -- a more formal evaluation. We will have several semesters of test results to guide us and we will have all of the data we need to make sure that we have set a standard that justifies the lofty ideals from which this university has grown. I know that there are those of you who have reservations about some of the curriculum decisions that have been made. You will have a chance to make your views known again as we begin the process anew. The General Studies Curriculum is not immutable. We simply will not allow any part of it to become set in stone. It will evolve as our experience with it evolves.
>
> . . . Our final goal for the nineties is to rededicate the university to the highest standards of teacher preparation and to secure the reputation of our teacher education program as the most respected and the best-known in the state.

IV. Faculty Response

It would be inappropriate to draw conclusions regarding the whole faculty at Southwest Texas State University based on

this study. The interviewed sample selected by Dean Newsom and Associate Dean Johnson included, among others, both faculty who were highly invested in General Studies and faculty who had expressed misgivings about the program. Admittedly, that segment of the faculty that is either apathetic, uninvolved or uninformed about General Studies is missing from the scope of this investigation. Further, although the sample does include fifteen percent of the tenured faculty at Southwest Texas, no scientific sampling procedure was employed, and no universal conclusions about the entire faculty are pretended.

Among the faculty and staff interviewed, I found overwhelming, broadly-based cross-disciplinary support for the University's curriculum requiring a strong academic program that affords a common background and educational foundation for all students. I found no one who challenged the primary premise that students need what President Hardesty identifies as "a unified and coherent understructure of skills and knowledge." In a university as diverse as this one, to encounter no one who would offer serious challenge to this basic premise was surprising. However, even though there is apparent philosophic unanimity about the "concept" of a solid academic foundation for students at Southwest Texas, it would be a grave error to assume that the General Studies program enjoys the overwhelming support of the faculty. In fact, there are several serious misgivings about General Studies as currently designed.

To address those misgivings requires some context. First,

Southwest Texas State University has long enjoyed the reputation of being student-oriented. Through a history that has seen Southwest evolve from a Normal School to a comprehensive State University, this institution has maintained a student-centered focus. Even during times of administrative and faculty transition, the general public and the academic community have perceived the instructional program to be considering as primary the educational needs of the student.

Secondly, SWT has grown in the size of its student body like no other public educational institution in the state during the last two decades. Today's student body is almost four times its size in the mid-sixties. Conversely, the number of faculty has not increased at nearly the same pace. Today's full time equivalent faculty is slightly less than three times its size in 1965. Consequently, the faculty carries a severe work overload.

Third, while it is heartening to the faculty for President Hardesty to acknowledge these observations formally and to address them explicitly in the context of stated goals for the coming decade, the well-documented tightening of funds from the state has placed everyone in the University on implicit notice that relief from the current overload will not come quickly. The comforting presidential rhetoric is tempered by the long standing faculty perception of the restricted effectiveness of even the best of stated intentions in the face of the harsh realities of the state's enrollment-driven funding formulae. This year's income from the state, President Hardesty reported in his General Faculty

speech in September, yielded actual faculty salary appropriations of two million dollars less than the historical average, a shortfall that would have translated into sixty additional faculty positions. In short, the faculty feels the oppression of course overloads, an extremely high student-faculty ratio (almost 20% higher than the state average), and the observed historical trend that the situation is more likely to get worse than better.

Fourth, the faculty feels that funds currently accessible to the University are going to be available only to those departments that are responsible for actively generating student semester credit hours. Consequently, increased, or possibly even continued, funding for faculty positions will come only to those departments which can demonstrate high student demand for their courses. Departments that teach courses that are primarily elective or are required in a limited number of degree programs will fare poorly compared to departments that teach broadly required courses.

In the harshness of perceived financial reality, any program or action of the university must be seen in the context of these observations. Therein lies the setting for the drama unfolding concerning General Studies. When the concept of General Studies was first addressed, explicit instructions were given to consider the "ideals" of general education without regard to financial reality. Faculty committees were charged with the responsibility of surveying the available literature, probing the current curricular innovations, and applying the most idealistic

standards to the development of a General Studies proposal. Questions of funding would be addressed at a later, more "appropriate," time. The ultimate factor for consideration was answering the question, "What is the best program of General Studies for Southwest Texas State University?"

Yet, as decisions have been made regarding the design of the General Studies program, it has been most difficult to maintain the highest principles of curricular idealism. Indeed, the perception of the faculty in general is that the development of the General Studies program has been an exercise in academic departmental gerrymandering. Realizing that decisions about inclusion or exclusion of specific courses in the General Studies curriculum could have an enormous potential impact on the number of credit hours that a department would either be guaranteed to control or would surrender to the control of another department, "battles for turf protection" were waged. Some players in the gerrymandering skirmishes proved to be far more adept than others. A three hour course gained here, two hours lost there -- on surface, the battle can seem insignificant. Yet, when one considers the implications of thousands of students being required to take specified courses in certain departments and consequently being prevented by degree program restraints from taking elective courses in other departments, already overtight departmental budgets are potentially shaped and skewed in favor of the General Studies requirements. Further, when departments long accustomed to tailoring degree programs around more flexible general education

restrictions consider the hourly quantitative implications of General Studies requirements together with the demands of external accrediting, licensing or certifying agencies, the result is perceived as potentially devastating.

Consequently, the arguments and misgivings of faculty about General Studies have very little to do with the concept of offering a strong academic foundation of general education to students. The faculty is strongly committed to educating students broadly. However, in the various departments in the University, there is broad disagreement as to what constitutes an adequate understructure of coherent academic foundation. Must the number of hours controlled by the general studies curriculum be the fifty-two to fifty-four proposed? Is an eighteen hour writing intensive component too much? Shouldn't all of the explicitly writing intensive elements of General Studies be included within the specified fifty-two to fifty-four hour curricular outline? Is demonstrated minimal proficiency in a foreign language an essential feature of a good general education? Are the testing components of General Studies going to provide adequate safeguards against racial, cultural, and economic bias? Will there be adequate remedial resources available to those students who do not successfully negotiate the exams?

If it is true, as now contended by some, that the General Studies curriculum will force some degree programs to be a minimum of 150 hours (higher if the specified minimal language proficiency has not already been demonstrated before arriving at SWT), will

the very diverse student population that Southwest Texas has begun to newly serve in the last couple of decades be functionally disenfranchised from the University? Is the intention of the General Studies curriculum to change the nature of the student body? If a particular discipline within the current scope of the University maintains that it will not be able to continue an accredited program if forced to meet the conditions of General Studies as currently designed, are the only alternatives an unaccredited program or withdrawal from the University? Can there be some curricular flexibility within General Studies?

The Southwest Texas faculty has been assured repeatedly that they will play a major role in the evolution of General Studies. Indeed, faculty committees have spent an enormous amount of time already in the development of the College of General Studies. Yet, faculty members communicate frustration that in spite of their extremely heavy investment of time and energy in the formative process thus far, General Studies still feels like an albatross. These faculty members do not trust that they will have constructive input into the modification of General Studies. In spite of the vast amount of time and energy already invested in the formation of the General Studies curriculum, these faculty members still articulate a sensation of distance. Instead of being perceived as the product of a concerted, broadly-based team effort by the faculty, General Studies is thought to be a program conceived at the highest administrative levels and then vertically enforced with horizontal faculty input being relatively

perfunctory.

Currently, dedicated faculty members who have been faithfully teaching in this institution for many years are faced with the implicit accusation that their teaching methodology has yielded "functional illiterates." Yet, during times when other universities were seduced by exotic curricular abberations, this University maintained a stated commitment to general education with the academic foundation curriculum. Couldn't the faculty have been encouraged and affirmed by modifying the Academic Foundations program instead of beginning an "innovative" curricular reform called "General Studies?" Many faculty members do not see General Studies as substantially different from Academic Foundations. Instead, it is contended that for far less financial investment and with much more good will, the academic foundations curriculum could have been revised and vitalized with substantially the same results that General Studies has yielded.

The Southwest Texas State University faculty is prepared to implement the College of General Studies in the fall of 1986. Public faculty dissent at this university is neither encouraged nor expected. However, although faculty compliance is high, morale is alarmingly low. President Hardesty will witness a faculty cooperatively and dilligently pursuing the stated institutional goals. However, unless the issues causing faculty dissatisfaction are forcefully addressed, the inevitable General Studies success story will mask a painful undercurrent of frustration that could ultimately erode the foundations of the University.

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